

**Watlington Road, Benson,  
South Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Croudace**

by M J Saunders  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code WRB99/62

October 1999

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Report 99/62

### Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Watlington Road, Benson, South Oxfordshire (SU 6205092300) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Mr P A Brooks, Business Development Co-ordinator for Croudace Housing in Partnership, Croudace House, Godstone Road, Caterham, Surrey, CR3 6XQ.

A planning application (P99/WO384) has been submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of housing on the site. As any possible archaeological deposits on the site may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks Mr Paul Smith (County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, who advise South Oxfordshire District Council on archaeological matters) has recommended the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in the form of a field evaluation prior to the determination of the application. This is to provide information on the archaeological potential of the site so that an informed and reasonable decision can be made to draw up a mitigation strategy to minimise the effects of development. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16 1990) and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire. The fieldwork was undertaken by M John Saunders assisted by Kate Allison and Jennifer Lowe. The site code is WRB99/62.

### Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located on the north side of Watlington Road (B4009), on the north-eastern outskirts of Benson. Benson itself lies to the east of the River Thames, north of Wallingford and south-east of Dorchester on Thames. The development area comprises a trapezoidal parcel of farmland of approximately 0.85 hectares and is generally level at a mean height of 55m above Ordnance Datum, but with a very slight slope down from north to south. Geological maps of the area show the underlying drift geology to be Second (Summertown –

Radley) Terrace Deposits of Younger River Gravels (BGS 1980). The geology observed in the trenches was a dark orange-brown sandy clay with gravels (flint).

## **Archaeological Background**

The site lies in an area from which a number of sites and finds of various periods are recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record. Benson is known to have been an important strategic settlement in Saxon times, lying as it does on the border between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. A stone church was erected by Offa and dedicated to Helena around AD 779 and an earlier church is thought to have been erected by St Birinus in AD 636. The surrounding area also contains numerous archaeological sites of Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval date, with stray finds of pottery, coins and worked flint. An undated enclosure and Neolithic cursus are located within Benson airfield and an extensive Roman settlement lies to the east of the church. Recent evaluations (Pine 1999a, 1999b) and an excavation at St. Helens Avenue (Pine forthcoming) have revealed important deposits of both Neolithic and Saxon date.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This was to be achieved by digging 10 trenches, each 21m long and 1.86m wide, in the positions shown on Figure 2, with the aim of achieving adequate spatial coverage of the site. The trenches were excavated using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision, and all spoilheaps were monitored for artefacts. All certain or possible archaeological deposits or features were to be hand cleaned and fully recorded and sufficient of these excavated to satisfy the terms of the brief.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix I.

## **Results**

All the trenches were 21.00m long, except Trench 6 which was 22.00m long. The stratigraphy in all the trenches was typically turf and topsoil over a dark brown sandy-clay subsoil onto a dark reddish-brown sandy

clay with gravel/flints (Plates 1 and 2). The depth at which the natural geology was encountered was fairly consistent, with a mean depth of 0.47m. Trenches 1 and 8 were each overcut at one end in order to check the geology and confirm that the appropriate level had been reached. No archaeological features or deposits were present and, although the spoilheaps were thoroughly inspected for artefacts, especially struck flints, none were found.

### **Finds**

No finds were recovered from the spoilheaps or from the base of the trenches.

### **Conclusion**

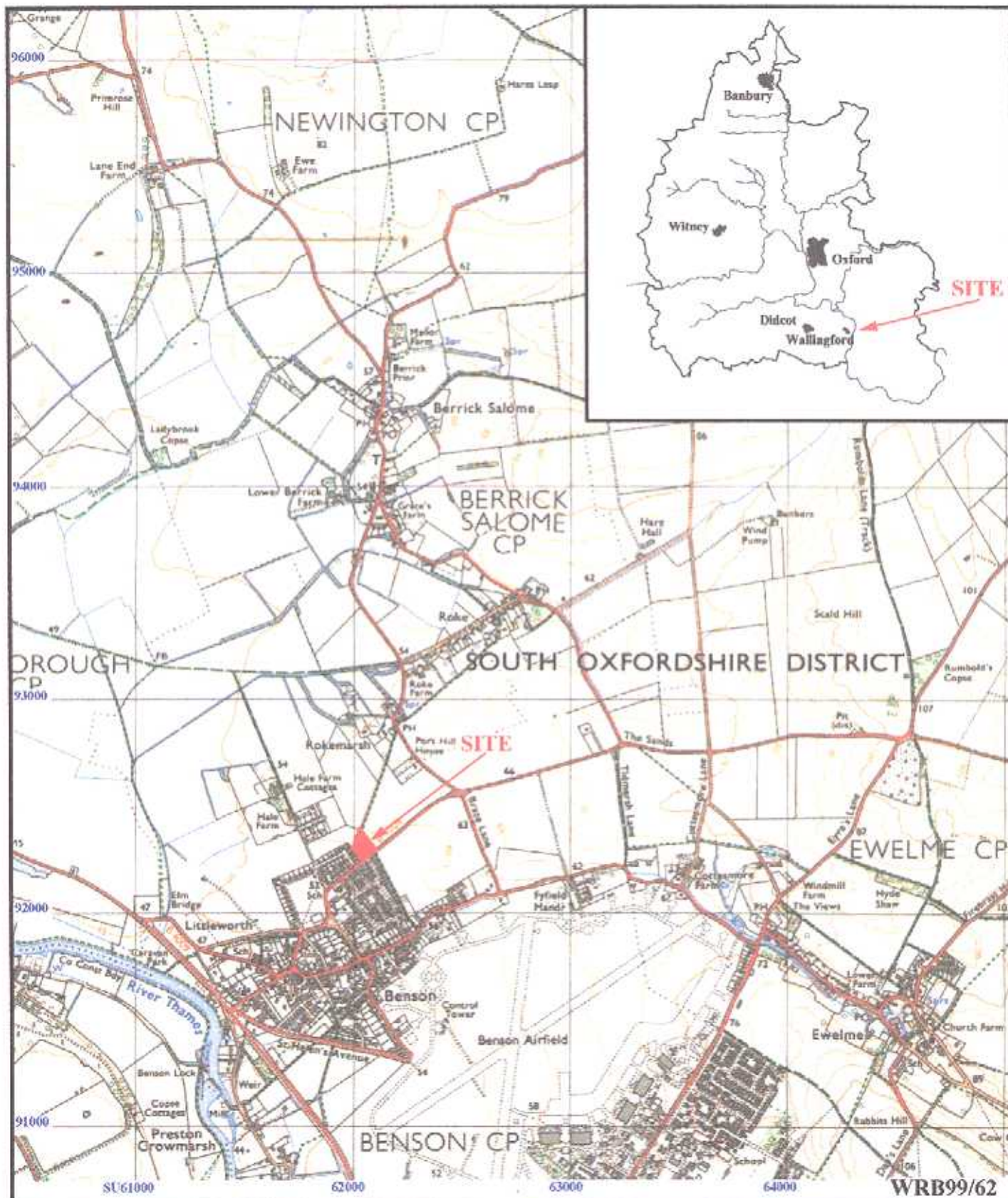
The evaluation did not identify any archaeological features or deposits in the proposal area, nor were any artefacts recovered. It is therefore considered unlikely that the proposed development will cause damage or destruction to archaeological remains.

### **References**

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1: 50000 series, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Pine, J, 1999a, St Helens Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire, An Archaeological Evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Report 99/14, Reading
- Pine, J, 1999b, St Helens Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire, An Archaeological Evaluation - Stage 2, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Report 99/14-2, Reading
- Pine, J, forthcoming, The Archaeological Excavations at St Helens Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire, *Oxoniensia* PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO

## Appendix 1: Trench Details

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	21.00	1.86	0.82 (NW) 0.52 (SE)	0.32m of turf and topsoil over 0.20m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
2	21.00	1.86	0.56 (SW) 0.48 (NE)	0.26m of turf and topsoil over 0.22m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
3	21.00	1.86	0.47	0.21m of turf and topsoil over 0.22m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
4	21.00	1.86	0.58 (SW) 0.40 (NE)	0.25m of turf and topsoil over 0.15m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
5	21.00	1.86	0.35	0.20m of turf and topsoil over 0.12m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
6	22.00	1.86	0.50 (NW) 0.45 (SE)	0.25m of turf and topsoil over 0.20m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
7	21.00	1.86	0.51	0.27m of turf and topsoil over 0.24m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
8	21.00	1.86	0.72 (SW) 0.60 (NE)	0.30m of turf and topsoil over 0.26m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
9	21.00	1.86	0.58	0.26m of turf and topsoil over 0.28m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints
10	21.00	1.86	0.58	0.25m of turf and topsoil over 0.26m of dark brown sandy clay subsoil onto dark reddish-brown sandy clay with gravel/flints



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Figure 1. Location of site within Benson and Oxfordshire.

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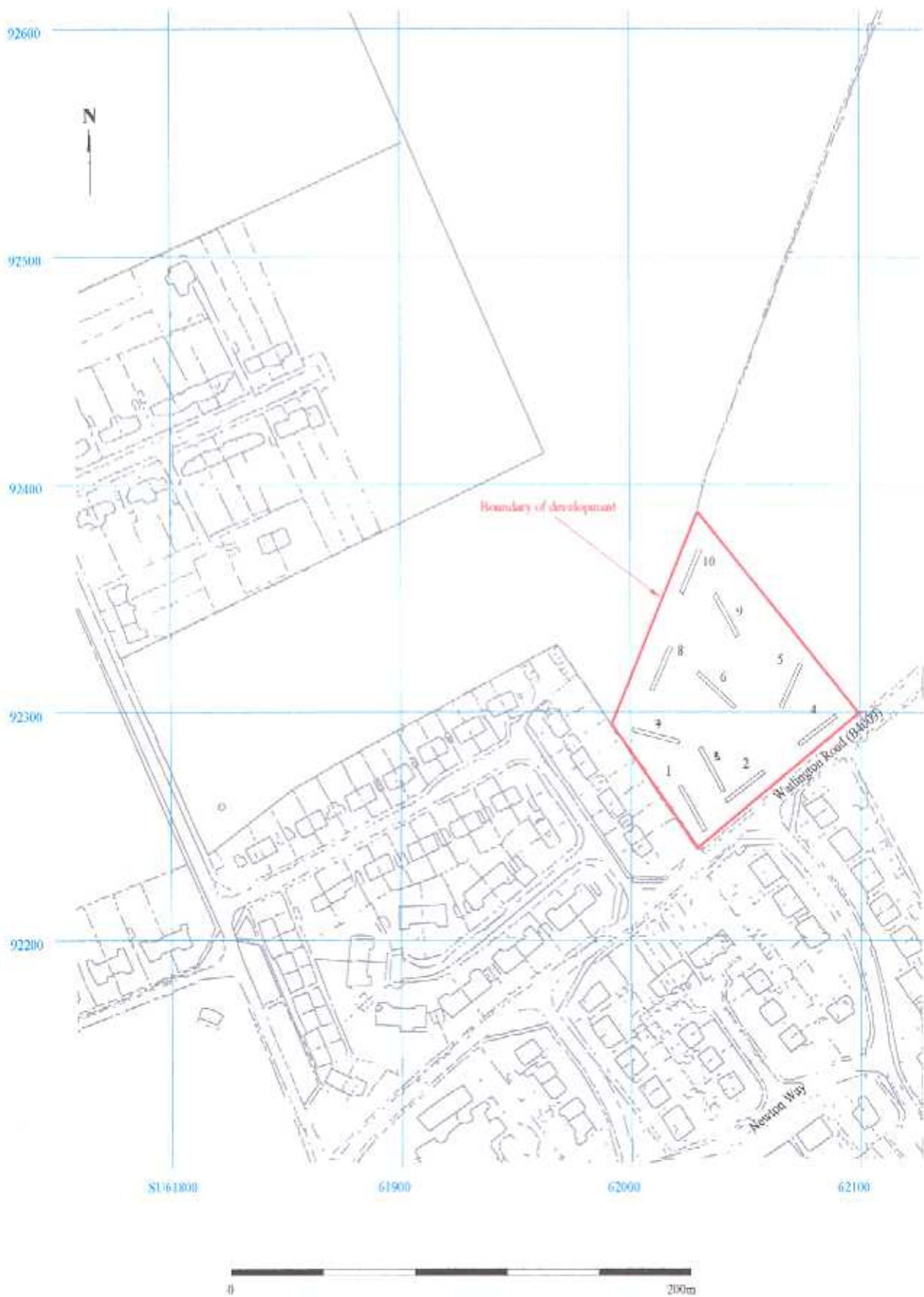


Figure 2. Trench location plan.



Plate 1. Trench 7 looking north west, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 10 looking north east, scales 1m and 2m.